

VZCZCXRO4166
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK
DE RUEHIHL #0107/01 1710451
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 200451Z JUN 06
FM REO HILLAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0665
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0651
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH 0716

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000107

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/20/2016
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH PROVINCE: MAHDI MILITIA ON THE OFFENSIVE?

REF: HILLAH 0102

HILLAH 00000107 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Alfred Fonteneau, Regional Coordinator, REO
Hillah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (c)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a recent visit to Diwaniyah, REO staff found that with the fulcrum of political influence in Diwaniyah swinging toward the Office of Martyr Sadr (OMS) and its associated Mahdi Militia (MM or Jaysh al-Mahdi), the Mahdi Militia are increasingly able to declare large sections of the city off-limits to Iraqi Security Forces. The reluctance of ISF units to patrol within Sadrists neighborhoods encourages Mahdi Militia to attack Coalition Forces patrols, as seen in a major MM assault against a Latvian patrol on the night of June 16. That same night, an Explosively Formed Projectile (EFP) attack south of Diwaniyah killed one US soldier. The next morning, an EFP strike on an Aegis convoy left three severely wounded. The attack occurred within city limits, close to Camp Echo, and not far from a police checkpoint. An Iraqi Army intelligence contact placed the attacks in context, saying that local MM strategy has moved from targeted assassinations to mounting high visibility operations aimed at intimidating the local population and displaying MM strength with attacks on unpopular targets.

END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) On the night of June 16, a routine Latvian patrol passing through a Sadrists neighborhood in the center of Diwaniyah came under intense RPG and small arms fire in what appears to have been a deliberately pre-staged ambush. Patrol participants estimated that upwards of one hundred MM members fired on the patrol from second-story rooftops, beginning with an initial wave of RPGs. The patrol had been accompanied by Iraqi Army gun trucks who refused to go further just before the ambush, saying it was too dangerous. Iraqi police were not present. The patrol pushed out of the immediate area without casualties. For Diwaniyah, the intensity of the assault was unprecedented.

¶3. (C) An EFP strike the same night left one American soldier dead south of Diwaniyah in what had been a historically calm rural area. The next morning, a hastily placed EFP hit a civilian convoy not far from the entrance to Camp Echo, severely wounding three Aegis private contractors. COMMENT: There is as yet no evidence as to the intended target, but the attack closely coincided with the expected arrival time of a REO Al-Hillah convoy headed to Diwaniyah for the biweekly PRDC meeting. END COMMENT Disturbingly, the EFP was quickly placed without site preparation in an area near a police check point in an example of the new "drop and pop" IEDs.

¶4. (C) The security situation in Diwaniyah has dramatically worsened over the last two months. Since January, there have

been 38 Improvised Explosive Device (IED) incidents within the province, of which twelve were found and 26 exploded. Seventeen of those were placed within the last 45 days.

15. (C) Frequent, but thankfully inept indirect fire (mortar and rockets) against Camp Echo continued over the same period. Four Katushka rockets were fired on the night of June 15. The next night, thirteen unidentified explosions were heard within the city along with small arms fire. While the explosions may have been caused by a tribal or tribal/sectarian dispute within Diwaniyah, it is more likely that the thirteen explosions were mortar rounds fired across the city from northern Sadrists neighborhoods toward Camp Echo on the south, falling short, and reportedly damaging at least one home and a school. Since April, formerly rare indirect fire against Echo is now occurring 1-2 times per week. A base contact noted that these days, the lights often are turned on after hours at the downtown OMS office building as MM members gather to celebrate the latest attack.

Putting it into Perspective: Mahdi Militia Moving into a New Phase?

16. (C) Provincial officials, Camp Echo intelligence personnel, and local contacts concur that a ring of neighborhoods on the north side of Diwaniyah are considered by Sadrists to be under their control. Local police will not patrol in those quarters. Qadisiyah provincial governor Hamza last month attempted to issue a "no go" order to Iraqi Security Forces and CF that placed those neighborhoods and some central areas close to Diwaniyah's OMS office building into a no-go "red zone." Provincial government and ISF contacts invariably urge REO staff to ask CF not to patrol in those areas, stating that patrols are an unnecessary provocation to the Sadrists. COMMENT: Coalition Forces retain full authority to decide patrol routes without prior consultation with the provincial government. Given the frequency of indirect fire attacks originating in these areas,

HILLAH 00000107 002.2 OF 002

unimpeded ability to patrol and react to threats in these neighborhoods seems essential. END COMMENT

17. (S) A local Iraqi security forces intelligence contact offered his personal assessment of the escalation of significant acts in Qadisiyah Province. He linked the Mahdi Militia's more aggressive stance to the assassination of former Governor Jamal Susoon Al-Lizimali on May 29 (reftel). Claiming that Muqtada al-Sadr's mother lives in Diwaniyah and that MAS frequently visits the city, he said that Mahdi Militia elements in the city were pushing forward to make the city a MM stronghold. Their campaign, he claimed, had an initial organizational phase, including the infiltration of IP units. The second phase included assassinations of ex-Baathists and Iraqis working with Coalition Forces (including public mention of a target "Black List"). Mahdi Militia has now entered the third phase, he stated. In order to intimidate a public which had grown increasingly weary of religious parties due to the lack of basic services, Mahdi Militia was moving toward more public acts of terror, beginning with the assassination of Al-Lizimali. He believed that MM now placed a high priority on showing the public that MM controlled the police at will and no longer recognized the Coalition Forces as having the "right" to enter Diwaniyah. In his view, the most effective way to respond would be to conduct raids, detaining leaders and cell organizers, while avoiding patrols that Sadrists would view as a "provocation." He urged that CF assign more attention and assets to counter the increased terrorist activity in the province.

18. (S) COMMENT: No one has claimed specific responsibility for Al-Lizimali's shooting, and while MM are suspect, the Badr Organization is also capable of ordering and carrying out the attack. The disappearance of the police from the scene during the shooting is one indicator pointing to possible Badr

involvement, given their extensive influence within local IP units. Our contact figuratively threw up his hands, noting that Fadilha's militia, al-Sarkhi/al-Hassani, and Wahibists are all active within the province, with each group willing to carry out operations in ways that suggests another. Regardless, the Qadisiyah provincial government seems increasingly at a loss in restoring order within the city. Governor Hamza's principal response so far has been to step up anti-CF rhetoric, taking on a Sadrists tone in his public comments.

¶9. (C) Arguably, terrorist acts are up across all five South Central provinces. However, Qadisiyah's travails are a reminder that significant differences exist across provinces in what might appear from the outside to be a monolithic region. To Qadisiyah's east, Wasit Province remains relatively calm and most acts of violence are assassinations and murders. To the north, Babil has avoided significant public unrest, in part because of effective police enforcement. The religious centers of Najaf and Karbala see occasional militia posturing, but security concerns are more along the lines of stemming assassinations, rolling up IED cells, and preventing car bombs.

END COMMENT
FONTENEAU